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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the development and utilization of the professional portfolio in the University of San Francisco's (California) teacher education program. It reviews the rationale and guidelines for using this performance-based teacher assessment model, reports the results of a survey of 45 recent credential program graduates' use of the portfolio, and discusses implications for beginning teachers' initial job search and on-going professional development. Surveys of the recent graduates asked how they had used their portfolios in their job search and what role the portfolio played as an ongoing record of their career. Results indicated that beginning teachers used the portfolio in job interviews 83 percent of the time, and the portfolio enhanced their job search process. The portfolio allowed them to document and demonstrate in visual form their competency as teachers. Most reported that portfolios were an advantage in the job interview process, though several said that interviewers were not interested in seeing the portfolio. Over half of the respondents reported that they updated their professional portfolios on an ongoing basis. Respondents noted portfolios continued to provide a useful tool for reflecting on their professional and personal growth through their first years in the classroom. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

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DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIOS IN A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

A Paper Presented at the 50th Annual Conference of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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by

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Abstract

This paper reports on the development and utilization of the professional portfolio in the teacher education program at the University of San Francisco. It reviews the rationale and guidelines for use of this performance-based teacher assessment model, reports the results of a survey of 45 recent credential program graduates' use of the portfolio, and discusses implications for beginning teachers' initial job search and on-going professional development. New teachers reported that the portfolio was a tool that enhanced their job search process. It allowed them to document and demonstrate in visual form their competency as teachers. Furthermore, the portfolio continued to provide a useful tool for reflecting on their professional and personal growth through their first years in the classroom.

Introduction

A growing interest in authentic assessment in teacher education programs has spawned professional debate about the potential uses of portfolios. Discussion focuses on questions such as the following: Should a portfolio represent a teacher's "best work" or be "developmental" showing growth in one or more areas? Will it support mentoring, encourage self-reflection, or strengthen a resume? Various images of portfolios are suggested. Is one model more suitable in teacher education programs? Kenneth Wolf (1991) asks:

> Should the schoolteacher's portfolio resemble the photographer's, which presents only the very best work, or the pilot's log, in which every flight is recorded? Should the portfolio display all of a person's work -- the good, the bad, and the ugly -- or only the work of which the person is most proud? Or is teaching so dissimilar from other occupations that the model for the schoolteacher's portfolio should not be borrowed from any existing models? (p. 134)

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1991), Teach for America (1996), and the Teacher Assessment Project at Stanford University (Shulmam, Bird, & Haertel, 1989), among others, concluded that a teacher's portfolio should contain examples of the teacher's very best work. We, at the University of San Francisco, have also adopted this model. We want our credential candidates to "select work that most flatteringly illustrates their knowledge and accomplishments." As Wolf (1991) explains, a lesson is selected for inclusion if "it contributed in some significant way to the (new) teacher's growth or revealed important insights" (p. 134). A "showcase" portfolio (Diez, 1994) is constructed and revised over time to illustrate the teacher candidate's best work, focusing on successful lessons and responses to the complex problems of student teaching. The crucial decision is what artifacts, representing the best array of one's talents, should be included.

Rationale for Portfolio Development

Like artists and models who develop portfolios to aid them in pursuit of employment, the professional or career portfolios developed by newly credentialed teachers can give them a "portfolio advantage" in employment interviews. The portfolios set these new teachers apart from other candidates by presenting tangible evidence of their skills and abilities. At the University of San Francisco (USF), our beginning teachers develop portfolios to present t during job interviews to illustrate their accomplishments, as well as clearly and dramatically demonstrate the quality of their work. Guillaume and Yopp (1995) state:

> ...portfolios allow them to exercise control of portions of the interview...provid(ing) visual evidence of their best lessons, their approach to reading instruction, or their strategies for classroom management. (p. 96)

The portfolio strengthens the new teacher's resume and supplements the interview process by providing multiple sources of evidence collected over time, sorted, and refined to reflect the individual's best work. The final, polished professional portfolio is an important marketing tool for promoting the beginning teacher's skills and abilities.

Portfolio development requires new teachers to demonstrate their integration of educational theory with knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired from a variety of teaching experiences. It allows them to demonstrate their own standards of excellence through tangible documents (Barton & Collins, 1993). As an organizing center, it guides new teachers in defining their values and beliefs about teaching and learning, while helping them reflect on their teaching practices and on what they have observed in their classrooms and schools. Another advantage of building a professional portfolio is that it allows these teachers to "walk their talk." Developing a portfolio benefits the teacher in the same way student portfolios enhance classroom learning (Danielson, 1996). "Having constructed a record of their own learning,...teachers may be more aware of the scope of the process, of potential trouble spots, and the rewards that accompany portfolio development" (Guillaume & Yopp, 1995, p. 96). We recommmend that new teachers tell students about their professional portfolio. Students often suggest entries, and provide copies of their work.

Recognizing that "teaching portfolios are becoming...the most effective tool in improving the instruction of both new and seasoned teachers and in proving a supportive, convincing method of evaluation" (Zubizarreta, 1994, p. 323), many school districts now require new teachers to maintain portfolios as part of their induction process and as part of competency evaluation in the tenure process. New teachers find that they can organize much of the required portfolio information into the following domains of teaching competence, modeled after the new California Standards for the Teaching Profession (California State Department of Education Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1995; Santa Cruz County Office of Education, 1996):

- How I Organize and Manage My Classroom
- How I Plan and Design Instruction
- How I Deliver Instruction
- How I Demonstrate Subject Matter Competence
- How I Diagnose and Evaluate My Students' Learning
- How I Participate as a Member of a Learning Community

Using these six standards of teaching competence as a framework, new teachers at the University of San Francisco build a portfolio that exhibits their effectiveness in each area.

In deciding what to include in these teaching portfolios, our new teachers must reflect carefully as they try to determine just what constitutes examples of their "best work." Typically, it consists of documentation of the highlights of their field placements. The portfolio often includes two written unit plans taught in field practicums, a videotaped lesson, instructional materials, assignments given to students during the unit, and examples of student work with evaluative feedback. A portfolio is strengthened when it documents a series of interdisciplinary lessons. Any inconsistencies and contradictions among entriesimmediately becomes evident, so teacher candidates are advised to select portfolio artifacts carefully and thoughtfully (Jonson & Hodges, 1996).

Survey on Portfolio Effectiveness

A survey to collect information regarding the use of presentation portfolios was sent to teachers who had graduated from the USF credential program over the past two years. Responents were asked how they had used their portfolio in their job search and what role the portfolio played as an on-going record of their career.

Responses were received from thirty percent of the teachers contacted. All respondents indicated they had interviewed with more than one school or school district. Portfolios were used in interviews eight-three percent of the time. One teacher commented:

> I found the portfolio to be very helpful. I feel that it helped me provide vivid and tangible examples of my teaching methods, ideas and skills. I also felt more secure having it with me at interviews because it gave me something to talk about.

Other comments included:

> It was helpful in terms of having the photos to explain what experiences I had. The interviewer could see it right there in front of him.

> Although the portfolio took hours of preparation, it is an excellent visual tool to use in an interview versus explaining verbally everything in detail.

> It was a great help to me while I was interviewing and gave me some solid evidence of what I was talking about.

> A portfolio definitely adds to the interview process for the better.

Responses indicated that during the interview process, fifty-percent of the teachers exhibited the entire portfolio, while the other half selected specific sections of the portfolio to respond to interview questions. This second group used the portfolio primarily to augment responses to questions about curriculum development and lesson presentation, particularly in specific subject matter areas. Respondents stated:

> I liked the idea of using it in the interview to demonstrate competency in answer to a question.

> It showed professionalism as well as my organization skills -- not to mention my teaching strategies.

Of particular interest to interviewers were student work samples that indicated how the teacher had facilitated the learning process through assignments given, enhancement or remediation to meet individual student needs, and approaches to assessment. As one new teacher explained:

> Everyone to whom I have shown my portfolio has been impressed with...the student work that is included. Others have commented on the pictures because these show a glimpse of who your students were and how you organized your room.

Over half of the teachers responding indicated they are continuing to update their professional portfolio. Of those not currently updating their portfolios, fifty percent commented that they intend to do so when time permits. Two reasons were given for continued portfolio development: documentation of teaching competency, and reflection for self-assessment.

> It has been interesting to see how I've changed...as well as to see the progress of my students.

> The portfolio is a chronicle of my career in education. It helps me make future plans.

While the majority of respondents found the portfolios were an advantage in the job interview process, several reported that interviewers were not interested in viewing the portfolio. One teacher commented, "Some interviewers did not want to see a portfolio at all." Other comments included:

> I went to over fifteen interviews - only one principal wanted to look at it. Interviews average twenty minutes - not a lot of time.

> I expected to be asked to show it to my different interviewers. I'm surprised I wasn't - public or private school. I did expect to use the portfolio.

Findings

Several themes were apparent in the responses to the survey. These focused on the usefulness of portfolios in the job search, and the maintenance of portfolios to illustrate continued professional and personal growth

First, how were portfolios used in the job search? While the teachers responding indicated an even split between showing the entire portfolio versus specific sections, this is an area that needs special consideration. Interview time is often limited. To exhibit an entire portfolio during a brief interview required the candidate's to take an overly-broad approach in describing their teaching, rather than to focus on specific areas of strength. In addition, survey responses indicated that interviewers often asked very focused questions related to teaching academic content and developing curriculum and lessons. Samples of student work were of intense interest to many of the interviewers, especially when used to augment answers.

The lack of some interviewers' interest in perusing portfolios presents a challenge for teacher education programs that require credential candidates to create one. How do we prepare our students for such interview situations? How can they successfully introduce portfolios to illustrate their teaching competence, despite an initial lack of interest on the part of the interviewer?

Based on the survey, two primary interview focus areas related to teacher competence in subject matter content and curriculum development. To effectively answer either type of question, teachers found the portfolio of great help. Those entering interviews of limited time or where an interviewer had only a moderate interest in the portfolio had to make an "on-the-spot" decision on how to incorporate the portfolio to respond to questions. The key was designing the portfolio so they could quickly and efficiently access examples.

Most teachers contacted in this survey saw their portfolio as an on-going project. For some, continued review and redesign of the portfolio was a way of demonstrating continuing growth and competency as a teacher. From another perspective the portfolio was a means of self assessment. As one former student stated it "is a chronicle of my career in education." Rather than being two separate viewpoints, these two "reasons" go hand in hand. Professional growth in teaching is closely related to one's ability to self-assess and make changes in how the teaching "job" is accomplished.

The use of professional portfolios for pre-service teachers in credential programs is relatively new. Teachers who completed portfolios as part of the University of San Francisco Teacher Education Program graduated in the last two years. For these beginning teachers the professional portfolio was a tool that enhanced their job search process. These teachers found the portfolios gave them solid evidence, presented in visual form, of their best teaching practice. It gave

them tangible examples on which to base their responses to interview questions. The portfolio allowed them to document and demonstrate their competency as teachers. It also continues to be a useful tool for enhancing their professional and personal growth. Portfolios document how well they are evolving as professional educators.

Conclusions

In our investigation of the development and use of professional portfolios by beginning teachers, we found a number of benefits. First, portfolios are a means to assess professional development of students in teacher education programs. These portfolios provide evidence of growth in teaching skills and abilities over time as well as demonstrate the new teacher's understanding of the connection between educational theory and actual classroom practice. Second, portfolios are a tool for self-reflection. Both new and seasoned teacher find portfolios an effective means of examining their teaching experiences. The thought process and analysis that enables teachers to review and select artifacts to demonstrate their "best work" encourages teachers to extract meaning from classroom experiences that enhances their professional development. Third, a professional portfolio strengthens a teacher's resume. It gives new teachers a "portfolio advantage" in employment interviews by providing tangible evidence of teaching skills and abilities. Our findings corroborates previous data reported by Guillaume and Yopp (1995) who state "...many administrators are impressed by the initiative displayed by student teachers' efforts to compose portfolios and that interviewers welcome the portfolios as vehicles to encourage professional discourse during interviews." (p. 96)

Finally, as performance assessment of students gains popularity, an increasing number of school districts are asking teachers to engage in assessment on the same terms as their students. If teachers use portfolio assessment to gauge students' progress, compiling one themselves allows them to practice what they preach. Portfolios are concrete products that illustrate what the teacher can actually do. As Cohen (1995) states:

> Recognizing that good teaching is a complex art, proponents of teacher performance assessment are looking for strategies that can capture what teachers do in the classroom, as well as their knowledge and judgment as professionals. They want to extend the concept of authentic assessment upward to include teachers themselves. (pp. 1, 3)

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Even in school districts where portfolios are not required, beginning teachers should nevertheless seriously consider keeping one to capture what they do in the classroom and their knowledge and decision-making as professional educators.

> During my first year teaching, I didn't keep a record of what I did and that taught me a valuable lesson -- you can't learn about how you're changing if you don't have a self-assessment tool. During my second year, a mentor suggested I keep a portfolio, and organizing and sharing it became a collegial activity. I've been teaching for four years now, and all I have to do to see how far I've come as teacher is to look at my portfolio. (Bozzone, 1994,p. 51)

We remind our USF students to sit down occasionally to review their portfolios, reflect on their growth, and pat themselves on the back because the evidence confirms that they are doing a great job.

> The portfolio is a chronicle of my career in education. It helps me make future plans. I also like looking at pictures of former students. It will be great to look at when I retire!
>
> USF graduate/survey respondent

Figure 1

University of San Francisco
Teacher Education Department

The Teacher's Portfolio

Questions and Answers

What should my presentation portfolio look like?

There is really no prescribed blueprint for a portfolio. It should reflect your own particular focus and preferences. However, here are some rules of thumb to help you produce a quality document:

1. Use a 3-ring presentation binder that allows you to insert materials and move them around.

- 2-inch thickness is probably fine; larger binders become too bulky and cumbersome
- select dark-colored binders (avoid bright neon, reds, plaid, etc.)
- organize contents into sections with tabbed dividers to easily locate materials
- select a binder you can hold comfortably for display purposes during an interview

2. The appearance of your portfolio should be impeccable, since it is a tangible representation of your personal standards of excellence. It should have:

- laser printing
- quality bond paper
- plastic page covers
- absence of typos and spelling errors
- clean, attractive pages (no coffee stains, white-outs, etc.)

3. Begin your portfolio with a title page and table of contents.

4. Be selective in adding the materials. More is not necessarily better. Keep in mind that an assessor or a prospective employer will want to peruse the portfolio and abstract information quickly.

5. Annotate your portfolio! Whenever you add an item to your portfolio, date it, and attach a note or caption that explains why you selected it --- what it shows about your abilities as a teacher.

6. Before beginning the interview process, practice displaying the portfolio while you discuss its contents. Can you see the contents without contorting your neck or

body? Can you easily point to items and turn pages? Consider the image you will project while presenting your portfolio.

What materials should I include in the portfolio?

Portfolios begin small and become more extensive and refined as the new teacher gets more involved in the professional life of his/her school and district. Some of the suggested materials will not be developed until your first year of teaching is completed. Materials marked below with an asterisk ('*') are optional.

Title Page
Table of Contents
Educational Philosophy (a brief credo that describes your strongest educational beliefs)
Professional Goals
Sample materials and photos that demonstrate teaching experiences and competencies
*Honors and Distinctions (e.g., certificates; award letters; list of achievements such as conference presentations, honorary societies, other recognitions)
*Newspaper clippings that cite your achievements
Resume
Letters of Reference
Copies of certificate of clearance, credential(s),TB test, CPR certificate, etc.
Duplicate copies of resume and letters of reference kept in a pocket at the back of your portfolio to be handed out during interviews as needed/requested.

Throughout your teaching career, continue to add materials that demonstrate your range of teaching experiences and competencies. Materials can include but are not limited to:

Samples of your classroom management plan/techniques/routines
Sample unit plan(s)
Sample lesson plan(s)
Sample learning/interest center plan(s)
Photos of bulletin boards
Samples of student work with written feedback and assessment
(include both exemplary work, as well as the work of students making progress more slowly)

Photos of teacher and students, engaged in large and small group interaction, field trips, and related learning activities. Each photo should be captioned.

Records of strategies used to handle a behavior problem, learning disability, difficult parent meeting, etc.

Samples of student learning assessment methods and tools

Letters and notices demonstrating communication and collaboration with parents

Professional involvements in school and district activities such as site council, committees, Back to School Night/Open House, performances, special events, fund raisers, etc.

*Video and audio tapes of teaching and classroom interaction

Summary of continuing education activities (workshops attended, organizations joined, etc.)

Clippings about your class from the school newsletter and/or local paper

Notes received from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators, with copies of your responses

Reflections from your students about your teaching.

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